

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

1. FEEDING ASSOCIATION OF THE LITTLE GREBE *PODICEPS RUFICOLLIS* (PALLAS) WITH DUCKS

The little grebe *Podiceps ruficollis* (Pallas) is known to associate with waterfowl for feeding, e.g. with coot *Fulica atra* (Ashmole *et al.* 1956), with shoveller *Anas clypeata* (King 1963), with Cape shoveller *Anas smithii* (Siegfried 1971), with feral domestic duck (Robson 1975) and with maccoa duck *Oxyura maccoa* (Burger and Berruti 1977). On three different occasions I have seen little grebes commensally feeding with shoveller, with pintail *Anas acuta*, and with pintail and wigeon *Anas penelope*.

On 28 November 1982, in the Dihaila jheel inside the Karera Bustard Sanctuary, Shivpuri district of Madhya Pradesh, I saw a little grebe continuously following a male shoveller for about 25 minutes. The depth of the water where the shoveller was feeding was about 20 cm and as it raked up the water by dabbling at the surface or by up-ending, the little grebe was seen to dive and pick up small prey items.

On 16 January 1988, in Lakh-Bahosi jheel in Farrukhabad district of Uttar Pradesh, at about 1130 hrs, I saw two little grebes attending four actively foraging male pintails. As soon as the pintails up-ended, the grebes would dive behind them. Once a grebe dived so close to a pintail that it was kicked by the latter's paddling feet. The grebe would dive only after the pintails had up-ended for feeding. Twice one of the grebes dived in the middle of three up-ended pintails. The average time spent inside the water by the grebes was 13.4 seconds ($n=7$, $SD = \pm 2.93$). From the time I saw this association, it lasted for 15 minutes. The pintails were not bothered by the presence of grebes and no agonistic interaction was noticed. Only once did I see a grebe bringing something from the water and swallowing it. Most of the time the food was possibly eaten while inside the water.

The third sighting of this commensalism was on 18 January 1988 at the Berkhera jheel in the Karera

Bustard Sanctuary. At 1705 hrs I saw five little grebes following 10 male pintails and two male wigeons. In this case also, the grebes would dive behind the ducks when the latter had up-ended to feed on the submerged vegetation. This association was seen only for 4-5 minutes but it must have been going on for a longer time.

The grebes followed the ducks closely. I am not sure whether each grebe was associated with one particular individual duck or it was a random association. Sometimes three or four grebes would dive simultaneously and come out in unexpected spots (but within 2 m of the foraging ducks). After emerging, the grebe would scurry towards the nearest duck. As there were five grebes close together, diving in and out of the water, I could not correctly note the time each grebe spent inside the water because there was no way to identify different individuals.

Though I could not find out how far the grebes were successful in procuring food, in all the three cases observed, they were certainly benefiting from their commensal association with ducks. Such types of feeding association are known in other species of grebes also, for example, horned grebe *Podiceps auritus* attending surf scoter *Melanitta perspicillata*, and least grebe *P. dominicus* with domestic mallards *Anas platyrhynchos* (Paulson 1969); blackthroated grebe *P. novaehollandiae* with coot and dusky gallinule *Gallinula tenebrosa* (Hobbs 1958); pied-billed grebe *Podilymbus podiceps* with Louisiana heron *Hydranassa tricolor* and with snowy egret *Leucophoyx thula* (Mueller *et al.* 1972), so it is not an uncommon occurrence. However, as far as I know it has not been studied in detail. It would be interesting for Indian ornithologists to study this on our resident little grebe.

March 1, 1990

ASAD R. RAHMANI

REFERENCES

ASHMOLE, N.P., BROWN, R.G. & TINBERGEN, N. (1956):
Feeding association between coot and little grebe.

Brit. Birds 49: 501.

BURGER, A.E. & BERRUTI, A. (1977): Dabchicks, *Podiceps*

- ruficollis*, feeding in association with Maccoa ducks *Oxyura maccoa*. *Ostrich* 48: 47.
- HOBBS, J.N. (1958): Some notes on grebes. *Emu* 58: 129-132.
- KING, B. (1963): Feeding association between shovellers and little grebes. *Wildfowl* 14: 172.
- MUELLER, H.C., BIBEN, M.G. & SEARS, H.F. (1972): Feeding interactions between Pied-billed grebes and herons. *Auk* 89: 190.
- PAULSON, D.R. (1969): Commensal feeding in grebes. *Auk* 86: 759.
- ROBSON, R.W. (1975): Feeding association between little grebes and feral domestic ducks. *Brit. Birds* 68: 293-294.
- SIEGFRIED, W.R. (1971): Feeding association between *Podiceps ruficollis* and *Anas smithii*. *Ibis* 113: 236-238.

2. OCCURRENCE OF BLACKNECKED GREBE *PODICEPS NIGRICOLLIS* BREHM, LITTLE GREBE *P. RUFICOLLIS* (PALLAS) AND GOOSANDER *MERGUS MERGANSER* LINN. IN WEST SIKKIM

Khechiperi lake (1850 m) in west Sikkim is a small, oval, freshwater mountain lake roughly 1 km in diameter, surrounded by forested slopes. It lies 13 km off the road to Yoksum, the base camp for trekkers going to Dzongri or Goecha La, and is both a place of worship and a popular picnic spot because of its scenic beauty.

Migratory ducks have been regularly using the lake and during this year's Asian Waterfowl Count (15 January 1989) we counted 40 *Mergus merganser*, both male and female in full breeding plumage and 6 grebes which at first sight looked like 3 pairs of smaller, duller 'females' and bigger, brighter 'males'. On referring to the PICTORIAL GUIDE (Ali, S. and Ripley, S.D. 1983) and the HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN (Ali, S. and Ripley, S.D. 1983), the 'females' were identified as dabchicks or little grebes *Podiceps ruficollis* and the 'males' as blacknecked grebes *P. nigricollis* by their dark heads, silvery cheek patches and very conspicuous silvery grey flanks.

Both species were swimming together and at a little distance from the mergansers, which were feeding actively by diving suddenly into the water together, leaving just 4 to 6 individuals on the surface. We spent one hour (1100-1200 hrs) combing the lake, counting and re-counting until we were sure of the number of birds. There was a *puja* going on on the bank of the lake but this did not seem to disturb the birds which were moving around c. 300 m away, nearer the opposite shore of the lake.

In November-December 1988, a party of

picnickers reported over a hundred of the 'black-and-white ducks' or mergansers which they said were quite 'tame' and swimming 20-30 m from them. A month earlier, during a casual visit to the lake in October 1988 on my way to Yoksum, I had seen just 2 dabchicks on the otherwise empty lake. Apparently the mergansers and blacknecked grebes are transient migrants. That the dabchicks are year-round residents was confirmed by the local wildlife guards.

The merganser has been described as "The only resident duck which also possibly breeds....at high elevations...."(BIRDS OF SIKKIM, Ali, S. 1981), "....possibly in North Sikkim...." (HANDBOOK 1: 204-205). The dabchick has been described as "Common throughout the Indian subcontinent, east to Assam and Manipur, south into Ceylon from the plains to c. 1800 m altitude (in Kashmir)," (HANDBOOK 1: 7). Our observations are thus both interesting records for Sikkim.

No such data are available on the blacknecked grebe, the nearest record being in Nepal by R.L. Fleming (1957, *Fieldiana, Zool.* 41(1): 48) (HANDBOOK 1: 5). This bird, with the status of uncommon winter visitor, breeding extralimally in the Palaearctic region from Europe to China and Japan, south to Turkestan and whose migratory status is not known, seems to be a new record for Sikkim, probably a winter migrant from China. Whether it is a rare visitor needs to be confirmed.

July 29, 1989 USHA GANGULI-LACHUNGPA